

Accidental Death of an Anarchist

Dario Fo

About the play

The action of the play is focused on the real-life events of 12 December 1969 in the Piazza Fontana, Milan. The subsequent arrest and the mysterious death of Giuseppe Pinelli become the focus of exposure by the Maniac. His unconventional techniques unearth the corruption of the police at all levels with regard to the death of Pinelli. Through the Maniac Dario Fo asks the audience to question the procedure of those who rule the country and those who act upon their bidding.

Context

A satirical and political comedy, this play entertains audiences and once it has made them laugh it reveals the brutal truth of events. Fo uses metatheatrical techniques to peel away the facade of the play and expose the reality. This is seen most clearly in the final scene where the maniac enters the audience and alternative solutions to the play are enacted.

The style of the play is influenced by the Renaissance Italian theatre of the commedia dell'arte. The improvised style and physical acting style of Fo's play imitate this. The "type" characters of the genre are evident in the bold and grotesque characters in the play.

Although rooted in the events of 1969, this play has been updated for audiences in modernised versions to incorporate the corruption of existing governments all over the world. Can you think of any?

Main characters

Maniac - Pivotal character. Considered "mad" but the sanest of all characters. He exposes the contradictions in the play.

Bertozzo - He sets the context of the play in Act one and only returns in Act two to be a foil for a series of slap stick routines.

Inspector Pissani - He connects the action of the play to the actual events of the Milan explosion. He also represents a higher level of bureaucracy and status that deconstructs during the play.

Superintendent - Oafish superior to Pissani.

Felletti - The only female character. She represents "the press" and calls into question their role in events.



Design

When approaching the text as a designer, here are some things to consider:

Concept: What is your concept? Production style? Chosen historical period? Research this and how it might influence your design ideas.

Themes: How are they going to be expressed in your design ideas for the whole play and from scene to scene?

How can your ideas help to communicate what you know about the characters and their relationships with others in the play?

Design skills include:

Set & props, e.g. stage space & shape, location, set construct, furniture and large props

Costume, e.g. style, historical period, colour, texture of fabric and embellishments

Hair and Makeup, e.g. style, colour, accessories, body makeup.

Lighting, e.g. type of lighting, position of lanterns, colour and intensity

Sound, e.g. type of sound (music, sound effects or soundscape), intensity, length of cue and use of effects on the sound

Acting

When approaching the text as an actor, here are some things to consider:

Research your character throughout the play and before its action.

Acting style - This could be naturalistic but because the play is influenced by commedia dell'arte the slapstick and physical style of the action will impact upon the choices an actor makes.

Explore the relationships between characters in the given circumstances of the play and each scene.

What are the motivations of the character to behave the way they do? Do they change? Why?

What do they really mean when they engage in dialogue or are silent? Subtext is very important in the play and is unpicked by the Maniac in his interrogations.

How do they communicate this to an audience?

Vocal skills, e.g. pitch, tone, rhythm, pausing, emphasis

Physical skills, e.g. facial expression, posture, gesture, the physical use of levels, the speed of movement

Directing: [in the exam, the element of **directing** will focus entirely on the relationship a director has with the actors.]

What type of acting style will be used? What are the conventions of this style and how might you use them in rehearsal with actors?

How might they move in the space? What do the proxemics between characters convey about their relationship? How could you as a director show the relationship between characters in the way they interact physically and vocally? How important is their entrance or exit from a scene and how could you get your actors to communicate this? There are several areas of action in each scene - how will they be identified by a director and how will the audience be guided to watch them?

Some themes: Revolution vs Reform, Terrorism, Madness, Violence and Intimidation, the Absurdity of Life, The Role of Theatre to Expose Corruption - Illusion vs Reality